Dreiser Studies

ISSN 0896-6362

Volume 30, Number 1 Spring 1999

CONTENTS

Essays

Carol S. Loranger and *Dennis Loranger*,
Collaborating on "The Banks of the Wabash":
A Brief History of an Interdisciplinary Debate,
Some New Evidence, and a Reflexive Consideration
of Turf and Ownership 3

Scott D. Emmert,
Dreiser's Metaphor: *The Stoic* and
Cowperwood's Tomb 21

Nancy Warner Barrineau,
Theodore Dreiser and *Martin Dressler*:
Tales of American Dreamers 35

Reviews

Twelve Men, ed. Robert Coltrane
Dawn, ed. T. D. Nostwich
Reviewed by Jerome Loving 46
Marguerite Tjader, *Love That Will Not Let Me Go: My Time with Theodore Dreiser*, ed. Lawrence E. Hussman
*Reviewed by Donna Campbe*ll 49
Dreiser and Veblen, Saboteurs of the Status Quo,
by Clare Virginia Eby
Reviewed by Laura Hapke 52

News & Notes 54

Collaborating on "The Banks of the Wabash":
A Brief History of an Interdisciplinary Debate, Some New Evidence, and a Reflexive Consideration of Turf and Ownership

Carol S. Loranger
Dennis Loranger
Wright State University

Did Theodore Dreiser help write the lyrics for "On the Banks of the Wabash, Far Away" (1898), one of his brother Paul Dresser's most successful and enduring songs? In general, acceptance of one version of authorship or another is determined by one's group identification. Music historians tend to accept Dresser as sole writer, relying largely on Isidore Witmark's report of arranger Max Hoffman's undated recollections (Witmark and Goldberg 170-71). Literary historians lean toward Dreiser's version of events, with additional corroboration by niece Vera's report of Edward Dreiser's recollection (Dreiser and Howard 75-78). Hoosiers, mindful of Dreiser's unflattering portrayals of Indiana and its citizenry in *Hoosier Holiday* and his sins against morality in life and print, reject Dreiser outright.[1]

The only witness for the origins of "On the Banks of the Wabash, Far Away" not so far called to the bar is the song itself. In this essay we have attempted to overcome the pull of our individual associations—one of us specializes in twentieth century American popular song, the other in twentieth century American literature—in order to consider how the song's lyrics and structure might provide evidence of one or more hands. We have compared "Wabash" with other similar songs in the Dresser canon and with other representative songs of the era and have concluded that the song is sufficiently unusual as to suggest that Dresser probably did not write the song alone. We do not believe, as we will argue in our conclusion, that admitting the possibility of collaboration, however casual, diminishes Dresser's achievement as a writer of popular song.

Both the Dreiser and the Hoffman versions of the origins of the song are so often reproduced in the literature about "Wabash" that we will not reproduce them in the body of our essay, but instead include edited versions of each account, together with the song lyrics, in an appendix. But a brief history of the adoption and entrenchment of each version in various academic camps does, we believe, provide a useful context for our lyrical analysis—at least insofar as it suggests the limitations of the circumstantial and hearsay evidence usually adduced in the Dreiser-Dresser debate. The sheet music for "On the Banks of the Wabash, Far Away" gives Dresser sole credit for "Words and Music." Dreiser did not publicly claim credit as a collaborator until after Paul's death, though he indicated in a letter to his fiancée in 1898 that he had written the entire lyric and, in "Birth and Growth of a Popular Song" that same year, claimed to have been present at its composition. In *A Hoosier Holiday* (1916) Dreiser boasted parenthetically, "I wrote the first verse and chorus!" (350). "My Brother Paul," published in *Twelve Men* (1919), and "Concerning the Author of These Songs," Dreiser's introduction to Boni & Liveright's *Songs of Paul Dresser* (1927), give virtually identical, lengthy anecdotal accounts of the brothers collaborating on the song at the offices of *Ev'ry Month*, but limit Dreiser's contribution to drafting "in a most tentative manner" words for the first verse and chorus which Paul later polished and augmented with a second verse—"something with a story in it, a girl perhaps" ("My Brother" 101; "Concerning the Author" ix). As of 1927, Dreiser's limited version reigned among music historians and Dreiser scholars. Edward D. McDonald's 1928 bibliography of Dreiser's works lists "Wabash" as "a contribution of Theodore Dreiser's for which I could find no logical place in this study. As is known, Mr. Dreiser wrote the chorus of the above once very popular song" (80). Isaac Goldberg's 1930 history *Tin Pan Alley* likewise accepted Dreiser's version as "an old" and presumably unimpeachable story (121).

Max Hoffman's version of events did not surface until 1939 in Witmark and Goldberg's *From Ragtime to Swingtime: The Story of the House of Witmark*. Hoffman's remark that Paul "did not have the words" that Chicago summer day, only "a sort of dummy refrain" (171), was almost immediately taken up among

music historians. Whether Witmark's impressive recollection of "Max's own words" changed his mind, or whether his project of recording Witmark's memoirs prevented him from including the "old story" in *From Ragtime to Swingtime*, Goldberg does not say. Sigmund Spaeth reports both versions preparatory to dismissing Dreiser's in his 1948 *History of Popular Song in America*. David Jasen follows Spaeth in his *Tin Pan Alley* (1988). Jack Burton's *Blue Book of Tin Pan Alley* (1962) gives as Dreiser's a head-shakingly weird, sourceless account of the brothers walking in Central Park and Dreiser (!) waxing nostalgic about Terre Haute—"why not write one about the good old Wabash and those fine sycamores growing on its banks," Burton claims Dreiser claimed to have said. In order to dismiss Dreiser entirely, Burton concludes, "let it be definitely understood that brother Theodore did *not* write or contribute to the lyrics. They were all Paul's" (229). Dreiser's version elicits scorn from David Ewen in *The Life and Death of Tin Pan Alley* (1964) and *Great Men of American Popular Song* (1970), to name just two of the prolific Ewen's treatments of the authorship of Wabash: "Dreiser maintained he even helped Paul write the lyric" (*Life* 43; *Great* 49). Ewen concludes that Hoffman's version is "the one now considered authoritative" (*Life* 43). In *The Voices that Are Gone* (1994) Jon W. Finson quotes Hoffman at length, relegating Dreiser's "very different account" to a laconic footnote (120). Nicholas Tawa's *The Way to Tin Pan Alley* (1990) is rare in its acceptance Dreiser's version, as given by Vera Dreiser (30).

Among literary historians is a similar pattern. Ellen Moers notes musicologists' lack of credence in a footnote, but cites Dreiser's "four detailed and convincing accounts" as well as Paul's ordinarily "backward- rather than forward-looking" music as evidence for the collaboration (93-5). Following McDonald's lead, Hugh D. Atkinson lists "'On the Banks of the Wabash, Far Away' partially written by Dreiser" in his 1971 bibliography under "Miscellaneous Works" (11). James Lundquist's 1974 monograph *Theodore Dreiser* rejects Dreiser's more moderate claims, giving the novelist credit for "most of the lyrics" (10). In 1976 Vera Dreiser gave the Dreiser camp a boost by calling a new eyewitness, Paul and Theodore's

brother Ed, but limited Dreiser's contribution to a draft of the first verse: "Paul changed some of it, polished it, wrote the second verse, the chorus, and music" (78). Yoshinobu Hakutani relies on Vera Dreiser's account in *Young Dreiser*. The rogue position is taken by Pizer, Dowell and Rusch's 1975 Dreiser bibliography, which offers that Dreiser's "claim has recently been disputed" by editor Dowell himself (86).

Combing clippings and correspondence, Richard Dowell amassed a fairly substantial drift of testimonial and circumstantial evidence undermining Dreiser's claim to authorship for his 1970 entry into the debate, "'On the Banks of the Wabash': A Musical Whodunit." Testimony includes Hoffman's account, Hoosier poet Max Erhman's personal detestation of Dreiser, and two statements by Dresser, one in a letter to Mary E. South that he "definitely did" write the words to "Wabash" but that Dreiser had suggested the subject, and another in Dresser's boast to a Terre Haute newspaper that "he was a one man songwriting outfit" (102). While the latter two might seem at first to end the debate, they in fact require one to assume Paul's utter truthfulness and Theodore's complete mendacity. But whatever Paul Dresser's virtues as a brother and as a friend—and they were considerable—circumstances suggest he was no more ordinarily honest than Theodore. For example, in the same Terre Haute interview quoted above, which Dowell dates in April 1898, Paul implies he is a partner in Howley, Havilland, a position he did not formally hold until 1901 when the firm became Howley, Havilland and Dresser. Second, as Dowell reports, while Paul admitted in one interview that the Mary of the second verse was "fictitious," his sales instincts led him to dedicate the song to some real Mary, Mary E. South, the fourteen-year-old daughter—whom he had never met—of a Terre Haute acquaintance. It is to this Mary that Paul asserts his sole authorship. But, given Paul's well-documented penchant for the ladies, we give this claim the same weight we give Dreiser's similar boast to Jug—more suited to understanding the character of the man than to settling questions of authorship. As if realizing that this testimony is no stronger than Dreiser's, Dowell makes a series of circumstantial attacks on Dreiser's version, pointing out the variable dating and

chronological inaccuracies in Dreiser's accounts[2] and, most damning, the absence of any public claim by Dreiser during Dresser's lifetime—even when income from royalties might have been welcome. Dowell concludes that, while Dreiser may have suggested the topic and that the "dummy refrain" Hoffman mentioned may have been Dreiser's, the song was crafted over a period of time not less than a month, "Paul apparently revising so extensively that any facetious direction Dreiser might have given was inconsequential" (109).

Witmark's Hoffman anecdote and Dreiser's public silence until 1916 complicate, but need not entirely negate Dreiser's version. Hoffman's is not a first-person account. Rather it is Witmark's account of a recollection which the noted ragtime and coon-song composer and arranger did not himself publish. Witmark introduces the account as proof that "The words of that famous chorus are as much Paul Dresser's as the rest of the song," but this proof requires us to ignore the fact that Hoffman was summoned to Dresser's Chicago hotel room precisely because "Paul could not write out his musical inspirations." Dresser needed Hoffman to write the piano part and arrangement for the melody he hummed for him—so the rest of the song is not wholly Paul's either.[3] The fact that Dreiser made no claim on the royalties when he needed the money we find no more telling than the fact that Dreiser continued to claim partial credit for the song long after he didn't need either the money or the claim to fame. By all accounts Dresser was generous with his money and liberal in assisting Theodore, even when the brothers were feuding, especially during Dreiser's troubles after the failure of *Sister Carrie*. By 1919, when Dreiser gave the longest version of his account, Dresser's star had so far dimmed and Dreiser's so risen that the novelist could not reasonably expect to benefit from the association with the quaint balladeering of yesteryear. We have given in to the temptation to argue from circumstance in order to show the limitations of the evidence marshalled in the debate thus far—heavily dependent on assessments about the brothers' personalities and assumptions about motives, it is credible only insofar as the reader wishes it to be.

Arguing that Hoffman's account "does not necessarily

conflict with Theodore's," Richard Lingeman's *Theodore Dreiser: At the Gates of the City* adopts the position that the "dummy lyric" could indeed have been Dreiser's and that revising "the chorus that would fit [Dresser's] basic melody . . . entailed considerable expansion on his brother's idea" (180). Lingeman does not canvas the literature on popular song, but Philip Furia's 1996 work on Ira Gershwin's compositional practice, *Ira Gershwin: The Art of the Lyricist*, suggests that dummy lyrics did occasionally survive to become a pop song's final lyric. Lingeman also makes the first real reference to evidence the song itself might offer, observing that "the first verse . . . has a poetic quality and a literacy that Paul never attained in his lyrics, which tended to be either crude or florid" (180). But Lingeman does not specify what makes the first verse more poetic, or literate, than the rest of the song. If we grant that the chorus is Paul's or Paul's revision of Dreiser's original, Hoffman's singling out the line "Through the sycamores the candle lights were [sic] gleaming" as "one of the most poetic inspirations I had ever heard" (Witmark 171) suggests that "poetic quality," like many other qualities of popular song, is a matter of individual taste. Dreiser, moreover, is seldom considered, even by his fans, as a poetic writer, whereas Dresser, one must admit, made a successful living writing lyrics; so without further analysis, the poetic quality of individual lines is not in itself an indicator of authorship. While our position on the song's authorship is similar to Lingeman's, we don't believe it is necessary or useful to downplay Dresser's own achievements as a popular songwriter nor to implicitly dismiss popular song as crude or florid. The modes and expressions of popular song are its own, appropriate to itself even when inappropriate to another medium.

If Dresser were the sole writer of "On the Banks of the Wabash, Far Away," he seems to have been deliberately cramming it with salable icons. The nostalgic mood, where mother, sweetheart, and the old homestead are tangled together, conflates two commonplaces in popular songs of the turn of the century. Williams and Van Alstyne's "In the Shade of the Old Apple Tree" (1905), for instance, features a speaker who goes away to the city, leaving a sweetheart behind. He subsequently

returns to mourn over her grave under the titular tree: an icon of small town values equivalent to the churchyard along the Wabash. Or the speaker may be an old man, reflecting back on his happy marriage to a blushing rural maid who, at the time of the song, has "passed on," as in Buck and Morse's "Dear Old Girl" (1903). Departed mothers and the lost idyll of rural childhood, including Dresser's "Calling to Her Boy Just Once Again" (1900), "A Dream of My Boyhood Days" (1896) and "Your Mother Wants You Home, Boy (And She Wants You Awful Bad)" (n.d.) appear throughout Dresser's and other turn-of-the-century song-writers' oeuvres. Lost sweethearts, too, make up a significant portion of Dresser's work, as in "We Were Sweethearts for Many Years" (1895), "The Old Flame Flickers and I Wonder Why" (1898) and "The Town Where I Was Born" (1905)—with, in the latter, the childhood sweetheart signifying lost small town values, where folks were "staunch and true." But in general, and with the good sense of the inveterate ladies' man, Dresser keeps Mama and sweetheart separate.

Appropriate to the tradition of popular song worked by Dreiser was a strong, simple narrative contained in the verse. Structurally "Wabash" is typical of productions of its day, built on the standard verse-chorus form. Only a few of Dresser's songs use the more old-fashioned, strophic form. In a typical Dresser song in verse-chorus form the two verses would sketch a brief dramatic or narrative situation. The chorus, so-called though sung by a single voice, compressed the situation into a brief lyrical summation tied to a memorable melody. But "On the Banks of the Wabash, Far Away" sketches two distinct situations, one per verse, and the chorus, while offering an appropriate emotive summation for either situation, raises some consistency problems when both verses are taken together. The unusual pairing of separate narratives in "On the Banks of the Wabash, Far Away" may then provide the first clue to its origins.

In the first verse—the one claimed by Dreiser—the speaker apparently stands in the yard of his "Indiana homestead"; "cornfields" and "woodlands" stretch out before him. The dramatic immediacy of the scene and the speaker's presence in

the scene are confirmed by the present tense verbs: the cornfields *wave*, the woodlands *loom*. This bucolic scene leads to a reverie of his childhood. But something is missing: the speaker's mother. He wishes he could see her in the doorway "As she stood there years ago, her boy to greet." But though time has passed and mother is dead, the speaker has not physically left his boyhood home.

The chorus—which Dreiser claimed also to have written "almost as published," but which Vera Dreiser identifies as Paul's—elaborates in a more lyrical vein on the rural scenery and the nostalgic mood associated with it:

> Oh, the moonlight's fair tonight along the Wabash.
> From the fields there comes the scent of new-mown hay.
> Through the sycamores the candle lights are gleaming,
> On the banks of the Wabash, far away.

In the first three lines of the chorus the speaker still appears to be in Indiana; the smell of hay comes up from the fields and he can see his neighbor's lights. But the closing line, which is also the title, asserts that distance has in fact intervened: the Wabash is "far away." Is the distance spatial or temporal? If temporal, then the chorus enhances the complexity of the mood of the first verse by introducing an almost phenomenological understanding of time and the river and doing so with impressive economy: the Wabash the speaker observes now and the beautiful Wabash of his reveries exist simultaneously embodied in a single geographical constant. If the distance is spatial, however, what is one to do with the presence on "my Indiana homestead" asserted by the speaker in the verse? Is he fantasizing? If so, what are we to make of his inability to fantasize his mother into the picture? Should we call Dr. Freud? No. The verse clearly indicates that it is the bucolic scene that produces the reverie. The distance is temporal.

All parties to the Dreiser-Dresser debate agree that the second verse is wholly Paul's. This is the verse Dreiser claimed he didn't feel sincere enough to write. And the second verse does introduce a girl, albeit a dead one, along with a smattering of a story. As with the first verse, the speaker's temporal distance from the events recalled is stressed. But this verse also introduces a note of spatial distance at odds with the presence

implied by the first verse: the speaker seems to actually be somewhere else. It has been "Many years" since he last walked along the river "Arm in arm with sweetheart Mary" who is, like his mother, now dead. While the events are still only faintly suggested, the dramatic situation here is of a failed romance, with hints of the speaker's faithlessness. Though he tried to convince Mary that he loved her, and even asked her to marry him, she "thought I didn't mean it," and, as a consequence, is now "sleeping" in a churchyard. But in contrast with the temporal focus of the first verse—the past is gone, with loss of youth signified by the loss of the mother—the second verse insists on a loss of place as well as past. If the speaker still lived on the banks of the Wabash, if can hardly have been "many years" since he "strolled by the river" or "strolled thro' the churchyard." Also, this verse develops and plays heavily upon a spatial dialectic. The Wabash is *there*: "It was *there* I tried to tell her that I loved her, / It was *there* I begged of her to be my bride /. . . . / She's sleeping *there*, my angel Mary dear." The speaker is somewhere far away, willing to "give my future were she only *here*" (emphasis added).

This regret leads back into a repetition of the chorus. With this repetition the phrase "far away" makes implicit sense as a summation for the Mary narrative. But the Mary narrative renders the first verse, as well as the sequence of present tense verbs—*is*, *comes*, *are*—meaningless. The speaker cannot be both *in situ* mourning the absence of his mother and somewhere else regretting both the loss of Mary and the bucolic setting of his courtship. The chorus works with each verse individually—even though some conceptual juggling is required either to make "far away" mean "long ago" for the first verse or to read the chorus as imagining the absent Wabash for the second verse's past recollection—but not with both verses together. In this context it is interesting to note that either Witmark or Hoffman misremembers the verb tenses in the chorus, casting it as a recollection of a past scene: "the candle lights *were* gleaming"—thus accommodating it more closely to the second, Dresser, verse than to the first, disputed, verse.

The first verse carries a heavy weight of sensuous detail in its opening lines, with their 360º view of cornstalks in motion,

the perspectival looming of "clear and cool" woodlands—pictorial detail the second verse omits entirely. Since the chorus is almost entirely devoted to pictorial detail, it makes sense not to devote space to it in the more dramatic verses. However, if the first verse were indeed written by another hand than Paul's, with the chorus and the story yet to be conceived, it might have made sense to include some riparian detail in a song which was to be, in fact, about a river. More telling is the significant difference between the view described in the first verse and that given in the chorus: the speaker in the verse can see corn waving all around, the woods loom more darkly but are still clearly visible. But in the chorus it is evening; the moon is up, night-time dew carries the smell of cut hay, and what is visible from the sycamore wood is the light of candles which gleams through. Could our speaker see corn waving *and* candle lights gleaming?

Having subjected the lyric to such close scrutiny we should pause to admit that, since the 1950's, some analysts of popular song have debated on empirical or sociological grounds that lyrical content has little to do with the listener's understanding of a song. These writers often divide audiences into two groups: the majority who know what the song means without knowing what the words are and the minority who understand the words but reject or are unconvinced by them (Frith 118-119). The more content-oriented analysis practiced by writers such as Charles Hamm approaches popular song in terms of its overarching themes—in the case of "Wabash," "the burden of lost happiness and hope" coupled with nostalgia for the simplicities of rural life in an America "dominated more and more by urban centers" (302-7). Almost certainly the original audience for "Wabash" neither had a critical apparatus to bring to bear (indeed both Husserl and Freud's major work still lay in the future) nor, pleasure-bent, would it have been inclined to employ such apparatus if available. It may be that the typical audience member simply basked in the nostalgic glow shed by "Wabash" for the brief period while it was sung and then just as eagerly tapped his or her toe to some up-tempo number that followed it on the program. Popular song is generally more emotional than discursive. Bereft of melody and the immediate

power of performance, the lyrics may not hold up to the sort of attentive reading and coherency strictures we expect of more literary modes. Time has a way of stripping the verse of a popular song from one's consciousness, leaving the distillation of the chorus to stand for the song in the popular mind,[4] a phenomenon hit song-writers seem to have realized.

But popular songwriters and lyricists, whatever their audiences' expectations of them, maintained expectations of themselves and their craft visible to us at this late date as stylistic or compositional consistency across an individual oeuvre. Thus Ira Gershwin's clever, unexpected slant rhymes, Yip Harburg's class consciousness, Dresser's devotion to what Hamm has identified as individual narratives of loss and uprootedness (307). With the exception of his patriotic and minstrel songs, Hamm writes, "the majority of his songs deal with different stages of a single drama . . . of a young man or woman leaving home . . . leaving behind a mother . . . long[ing] for the peace and security of home" (306). Moreover, Dresser's practice seems to have been to concentrate on one stage of the drama of loss per song. Of the 58 songs included in *The Songs of Paul Dresser*, the standard collection of Dresser's work, only one song other than "Wabash," "In Dear Old Illinois" (1902), mixes the lost mother and lost sweetheart narratives. In its first verse "In Dear Old Illinois" is virtually a self-plagiarism of "Wabash" down to the "waving fields of corn" and "thoughts . . . turning homeward" to mother smiling from the cabin door.[5] The sweetheart of the second verse is not dead, merely lost; the speaker resolves to return to Illinois to find her. Unlike "Wabash," "Illinois" is clear on the speaker's temporal and spatial distance from the scenes recalled. By 1902 ragtime was making serious inroads on the popular song market, while Dresser's more lyrical style of songwriting hearkened back to the 19th century tradition of Foster and Thomas More (Hamm 302). Though Howley-Dresser would not fail until early 1904, few of Dresser's songs after the turn of the century were enjoying the success of "Wabash," nor would they until "My Gal Sal" in 1905, too late for Dresser to recover from his economic and physical decline. Like Harold Arlen and other later Tin Pan Alley songwriters confronted with the

phenomenon of rock and roll, Dresser seems to have been unable to accommodate or comprehend his market's changing tastes. We suspect that "In Dear Old Indiana" represents the songwriter manfully struggling to duplicate an earlier success rather than his commitment to working with dual narrative strategies. "My Gal Sal," on the other hand, with its lilting, mildly syncopated waltz rhythm, minimizing of narrative and rejection of bourgeois sentimentality, shows Dresser at the end adopting a more contemporary idiom.

Even without the conflicting stories of its genesis and composition, "On the Banks of the Wabash, Far Away" is lyrically far enough different from the run of Dresser's work to cause interest. Given the differences we have outlined above, as well as the accounts of Theodore and Edward Dreiser *and* Goldberg's account of Max Hoffman's recollection, we conclude that whether Dreiser wrote the first verse entirely or sketched it tentatively, he likely played some small part in the song's actual composition. How much may never be determined. Our own experience with collaborating on this essay further leans us toward viewing "Wabash" as a collaborative effort, for, while the literary critic assembled and polished the final draft and wrote her share of the draft text, she found her ordinary stylistic and compositional practice strongly affected by the music historian's drafts of sections, editorial comments and arguments. The suggestion that we write together "about the good old 'Wabash'" came from a colleague. Though working more formally than Dreiser and Dresser, we did step informally across disciplinary lines and believe it could be difficult for an observer to determine who wrote what: the music historian, for example, wrote "nearly as published" (but not entirely) the long close reading of the song lyric, while the literary critic compiled and wrote "nearly as published" (but not entirely) the long narrative history of the Dreiser-Dresser debate. There is at least one paragraph which each of us believes to be entirely his or her own, which, for the sake of domestic harmony we no longer discuss with each other. The concluding remarks and general observations about pop music derive more or less equally from our shared passion for twentieth-century popular song and years of bemusedly observing the curious

customs and shibboleths of the other's discipline.

That the debate over the song's authorship has, at fifty years, lived longer than did Dresser, we consider an issue of rather more enduring interest than that of the song's actual provenance, especially as, with few exceptions, the debate has solidified along disciplinary lines with each side implying that the song succeeds because of its own disciplinary giant. To state it more baldly, historians of popular song, long laboring under Adorno and others' dismissal of pop music as commercial trivia, might be expected to reject any notion that a pivotal figure in the canon needed assistance to write a hit, while students of the more respectable modern novel, might equally assume that, as Dreiser himself pointed out, "it really is easy" ("Birth" 497) to toss off a pop song and that the clearly more intellectual Theodore should be as good at it as Paul. The ideology of ownership in capital culture and the cult of bourgeois individualism in American capital culture militate against viewing collaboration as a valid means of production. But despite our culture's ideology of the "great man," popular song, like the similarly commercial media film and fiction, is inherently a collaborative art. As Dreiser, whom Hamm considers "the last serious American writer for at least half a century who tried to come to terms with popular song" (308) noted in "The Birth and Growth of a Popular Song," a song's success depends as much on the efforts of stage performers, song pluggers, orchestrators, organ-grinder concessionaires and sheet-music buying young ladies as on its composer and lyricist. As a songwriter, Dresser was not alone in needing assistance with arranging and scoring his music, nor would he be unique, despite his assertions to the contrary, in drawing on words and phrases overheard or recollected (as with "Take a Seat, Old Lady" [1894] or "Just Tell Them That You Saw Me" [1895]) or scraps of verse penned and discarded by colleagues and family. Similarly, the Doubleday *Sister Carrie* arises not only from the "collaboration" of its various editors but also from Dreiser's familiarity with and adaptation of Paul's favorite narrative. That edition's failure is at least partly attributable to Doubleday's reluctance to plug it—a failure to collaborate. "My Gal Sal" might even be considered a collaboration since in it Dresser seems to be readapting Carrie, Dreiser's adaptation of the sad

young thing in "Just Tell Them That You Saw Me." To admit collaboration need not, we feel, diminish the individual writer's accomplishment. Rather it recognizes the indebtedness of artists to their culture, time and personal milieu. And if it messes up the division of academic turf or upsets the ideology of ownership, so much the better.

Notes

1. Dresser's biographer Clayton Henderson gives an entertaining, if circumstantial account, particularly of Terre Hauteans' unilateral rejection of Dreiser's contribution to "Wabash." See "The Slippery Slopes of Fame: Paul Dresser and the Centennial of 'On the Banks of the Wabash, Far Away'." Indiana Historical Society. Online. Http://www.dgltd.com/ihs1830/henders.htm. 1998.

2. Dreiser's inability to remember dates extends beyond the dating of "Wabash," suggesting habitual inaccuracy rather than dishonesty. In "My Brother Paul" for example, he recalls Paul dying in "late November," rather than January 30, 1906, and gives his age as "not quite fifty-five," when Paul was, in fact, not quite fifty (108, 105).

3. Yet another second-hand anecdote—this one from Edward B. Marks's *They all Sang*—brings Paul's authorship into question:

> "Isn't the tune [of 'My Old New Hampshire Home' (w. Andrew Sterling, m. Harry Von Tilzer, 1898)] pretty much like Paul Dresser's 'Banks of the Wabash'?" I remarked to Bartley Costello the other day. 'Yes,' replied Costello, 'Paul was pretty sore about that, until somebody pointed out that the music for the verse was just like 'We Sat By the River, You and I,' and the music for the chorus was like that fine old English song, 'The Lifeboat Men.' Paul said no more about it. (43).

4. If you doubt this, try to remember the verse preceding the chorus of "After the Ball" or "Take Me Out to the Ball Game."

5. For another self-plagiarism, see the chorus of Dresser's "My Heart Still Clings to the Old First Love" (1901):

> Oh, the moonlight's fair tonight along the Wabash,
> From the fields there comes the breath of new mown hay,
> But my heart still clings to the old first love
> On the banks of the Wabash, far away.

Appendix

1. "On the Banks of the Wabash, Far Away"

'Round my Indiana homestead wave the cornfields,
In the distance loom the woodlands clear and cool,
Oftentimes my tho'ts revert to scenes of childhood,
Where I first received my lessons—Nature's school,
But one thing there is missing in the picture,
Without her face it seems so incomplete,
I long to see my mother in the doorway,
As she stood there years ago her boy to greet.

Chorus
Oh, the moonlight's fair tonight along the Wabash,
From the fields there comes the breath of new mown hay,
Through the sycamores the candle lights are gleaming,
On the banks of the Wabash, far away.

Many years have passed since I strolled by the river,
Arm in arm with sweetheart Mary by my side,
It was there I tried to tell her that I loved her,
It was there I begged of her to be my bride,
Long years have passed since I strolled thro' the churchyard,
She's sleeping there my angel Mary dear,
I loved her but she thought I didn't mean it,
Still I'd give my future were she only here.

Chorus
Oh, the moonlight's fair tonight along the Wabash,
From the fields there comes the breath of new mown hay,
Through the sycamores the candle lights are gleaming,
On the banks of the Wabash, far away.

2. From Theodore Dreiser, *Twelve Men*:

It was one of those delightful summer Sunday mornings (1896, I believe), when I was still connected with the firm . . . . "What do you suppose would make a good song these days?" [Paul] asked in an idle, meditative mood . . . "Why don't you give me an idea for one once in a while, sport? You ought to be able to suggest something."

"Me?" I queried, almost contemptuously. . . . "I can't write

those things. Why don't you write something about a State or a river? Look at 'My Old Kentucky Home,' 'Dixie,' 'Old Black Joe'. . . . Take Indiana—what's the matter with it—the Wabash River? It's as good as any other river, and you were 'raised' beside it."

I have to smile even now as I recall the apparent zest or feeling with which all at once he seized on this. . . . "That's not a bad idea," he agreed. . . . "Why don't you write the words and let me put the music to them? We'll do it together!"

After a little urging . . . I took a piece of paper and after meditating a while scribbled in the most tentative manner imaginable the first verse and chorus of that song almost as it was published. I think one or two lines were too long or didn't rhyme, but eventually either he or I hammered them into shape, but before that I rather shamefacedly turned them over to him, for somehow I was convinced that this work was not for me and that I was rather loftily and cynically attempting what my brother would do in all faith and feeling.

He read it, insisted that it was fine and that I should do a second verse, something with a story in it, a girl perhaps—a task which I solemnly rejected. (100-101)

3. From Isadore Witmark and Isaac Goldberg, *From Ragtime to Swingtime*:

Like so many other popular songsters Paul could not write out his musical inspirations. It was only natural that he should send for Max Hoffman, when he wanted a tune taken down. It is generally believed that Theodore Dreiser, brother of Paul Dresser, wrote the words to the chorus of *On the Banks of the Wabash*. . . . Yet, according to Max Hoffman, there is an error in [Dreiser's] account, and the words of that famous chorus are as much Paul Dresser's as the rest of the song. This, in Max's own words, is what really took place:

"I went to his room at the Auditorium Hotel. . . . It was summer; all the windows were open and Paul was mulling over a melody that was practically in finished form. But he did not have the words. So he had me play the full chorus over and over again for at least two or three hours, while he was writing down words, changing a line here and a phrase there until at last the lyric suited him. He had a sort of dummy refrain, which he was studying; but by the time he finished what he was writing down to my playing it was an altogether different lyric.

> "When Paul came to the line, 'Through the sycamores the candle lights were gleaming,' I was tremendously impressed. It struck me, at once, as one of the most poetic inspirations I had ever heard. . . .
>
> When Paul finished he asked me to make a piano part for publication at the earliest moment. I happened to have some music paper with me, and I wrote one right out, on the spot. . . . This piano part contained the lyric as Paul (and no one else) wrote it that night in my presence. The song was published precisely as I arranged it. . . . During the whole evening we spent together, Paul made no mention of anyone's having helped him with the song." (170-71)

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Dreiser's Metaphor: *The Stoic* and Cowperwood's Tomb

Scott D. Emmert
Purdue University

Contemporary reviewers of Theodore Dreiser's posthumously published novel *The Stoic* (1947), whether praising the book or not, saw in it what they wanted. Those critics who had little use for Dreiser's fiction found more of the same in *The Stoic*. An unsigned review in *Time* grumped: "Like all Dreiser novels, it is much chewed but badly digested: the product of his slow brooding on the injustices of life, clotted with unassimilated gobbets of ideas and massive lumps of earnest social purpose. *The Stoic* is as dated as a three-day-old cake" ("Last" 720). Other reviewers could praise the book only by ignoring portions of it, such as the ending in which Cowperwood's mistress Berenice experiences a conversion to Hindu spiritualism. James T. Farrell, no fan of the ending anyway, concentrated on the novel's naturalistic determinism in order, one senses, to pay tribute not so much to *The Stoic* but to Dreiser's literary influence (732). Still other writers seemed to offer hallelujahs for Dreiser's ostensible social and spiritual enlightenment. For example, Lloyd Morris of the *New York Herald Tribune Weekly Book Review* lauded both *The Stoic* and *The Bulwark* (1946) for providing "a confession of spiritual need and religious affirmation as candid and poignant as any in our literature. 'The Stoic' is a testament" (735).

This testament has been somewhat neglected by literary critics ever since. Scholars who have written books about Dreiser naturally must deal with *The Stoic* in some way, and a few have written individual articles about it. Barbara Hochman notes, however, that along with *The Bulwark*, *The Stoic* is considered to be one of Dreiser's "weakest" works (1).[1] A typical response comes from Donald Pizer who calls Dreiser's

last novel "dull and wooden" (343).[2] With such a negative critical assessment, it is not surprising that relatively few scholars have written about *The Stoic*.

Of all of the objections to *The Stoic* the one that recurs is to the ending. The last seven chapters, plus an appendix Helen Dreiser based on her husband's notes, devote themselves to describing Berenice's increasing immersion in Hinduism as she travels to India to engage in spiritual study and returns to begin a charity hospital with money Cowperwood had provided. To Pizer, Berenice's conversion is completely out of character for a woman long motivated by a "'cold, realistic' desire for wealth and power," and such an ending, which Dreiser left unfinished at his death, "throws the entire novel out of balance" because with Cowperwood dead, Berenice is suddenly elevated to the dominant character (344). Philip L. Gerber, furthermore, charges Dreiser with abandoning his hard-headed aesthetics: "This finale seems a complete afterthought, an aging novelist's daydream. . . . It represents a romantic departure from the adherence to verifiable fact which buttresses the chief strengths of Dreiser's work" ("Alabaster" 229).[3]

In short, notwithstanding certain defenses of the novel, *The Stoic*—in part because of its lack of physical description but mainly because of its abstract concluding chapters—strikes most critics either as not "Dreiserian" enough or as just plain bad Dreiser.[4] Often overlooked in the critical discussion, however, is one of the most moving scenes in Dreiser's fiction. While critics debate how well Dreiser understood Hindu philosophy, and while scholars attempt to sort out Dreiser's ownership of the novel's ending and his apparent recanting of its forays into Eastern spiritualism,[5] the funeral service for Cowperwood gets short shrift. The Cowperwood funeral scene deserves examination because it represents Dreiser's attempt to critique the material world that so often determines his characters' sense of self.

Although it is true that *The Stoic* provides "a thin realization of the social and physical substance of place" (Pizer 343), Dreiser's paring down of physical description and detail should not automatically be considered a weakness. And if *The Stoic*, among Dreiser's works, relies more heavily on dialogue

and summary to carry the story, that too is not necessarily a matter of his dwindling interest, talent, and health. For in *The Stoic* Dreiser tries to shed the physicality of his earlier work in order to suggest the meaning of Cowperwood's life in terms other than the materialistic. *The Stoic* reflects Dreiser's attempt to move from metonymy to metaphor, from a realist and naturalist aesthetic to a more modernist one. This attempt may account for the disappointment so many Dreiser readers feel when they come upon *The Stoic* and find it to be much different from his previous fiction and for the judgments of other readers who insist that the novel is somehow merely Dreiser at his worst.

It is certainly true that a major difference between *The Stoic* and the previous novels in the Cowperwood trilogy lies in the degree of presented detail. Of the first two Cowperwood novels Charles Child Walcutt writes: "*The Financier* and *The Titan* contain perhaps the greatest mass of documentation to be found in any American novels in the naturalistic tradition" (258). *The Stoic*, in contrast, lacks the physical description that characterizes most of Dreiser's fiction. One possible explanation for this apparent lack is that Dreiser wrangled with the novel over a number of years. Although he originally conceived of the Cowperwood saga as a single novel, when his publisher balked at such a enormous book, Dreiser decided on a trilogy (Gerber, "Dreiser's Stoic" 89). *The Financier* and *The Titan*, the first two novels in what Dreiser called *The Trilogy of Desire*, were published in 1912 and 1914 respectively. *The Stoic* was to undergo a much longer period of composition, however, as Dreiser worked on it periodically until his death in 1945. Over the novel's lengthy development, as he struggled with his own fluctuating interest in the work and dedicated himself to other writing projects, Dreiser may have lost interest in Cowperwood's social and economic milieu, a milieu he had previously depicted in great detail but the particularities of which, given his increasing devotion to speculative philosophy and political theory, likely no longer inspired him. In addition, the decades over which Dreiser worked intermittently on *The Stoic* removed him further and further from the actual time in which Cowperwood's story is set, thus perhaps making it more

difficult to immerse himself in Cowperwood's world and describe it intimately. In a letter to Farrell, furthermore, Dreiser suggests he was simply too worn out to produce a better book: "'I simply stopped writing at the end because I was tired'" (Gerber, *Theodore Dreiser* 109).

Walcutt, on the other hand, traces the defect of *The Stoic*'s loose construction to the bankruptcy of naturalism as an aesthetic: "The architectonics of naturalism have disappeared [in *The Stoic*]. Having liberated Dreiser's talent, naturalism left him with a cumbersome technique which he could not use for his newer ideas" (266). Because Dreiser "has not made use of modern techniques of characterization or modern concepts of personality" Walcutt argues, he is unable to write convincingly about spirituality (266). Essentially, Walcutt faults Dreiser for not being a modernist writer capable of skillfully portraying consciousness.

It is not that Dreiser lacked the necessary detail to fill out his last novel. As Gerber has demonstrated,[6] Dreiser's research into the life of Charles T. Yerkes, the historical basis for the Cowperwood story, was extensive. And early on Dreiser had every intention, it seems, of using this detail to shape *The Stoic*. Pizer notes that when Dreiser resumed earnest work on the novel in 1932, he "planned to describe in some detail the disastrous marriage of Mrs. Yerkes" and the dwindling of Yerkes's fortune after his death (333); yet the fate of Aileen Cowperwood, the fictional counterpart to the second Mrs. Yerkes, and of Cowperwood's fortune and art collection receive relatively little attention in *The Stoic*. Instead, choosing to summarize Aileen's story, Dreiser invented a more exalted destiny for Berenice and focused on her spiritual elevation, deviating from the biographical facts of Emilie Grigsby, the Yerkes protégé who provided the model for Cowperwood's mistress.[7]

That Dreiser came to rely less on physical description and factual detail when finishing *The Stoic* may not simply be an aesthetic miscalculation or the inevitable result of his ill health. Instead, the ending to *The Stoic* reveals his attempt to write less metonymically and more metaphorically, thus representing for him a fundamental aesthetic shift. In "The Metaphoric and

Metonymic Poles" Roman Jakobson argues that the aesthetics of romance is metaphoric and that of realism, and one might add of naturalism, is metonymic. Jakobson writes that "the realist author metonymically digresses from the plot to the atmosphere and from the characters to the setting in space and time," often making use of "synecdochic details" (1114). A reading of *Sister Carrie* shows how much Dreiser relied on metonymy. The "truly swell saloon" (43) that Hurstwood manages is described in some detail to reflect the man himself: both trace their appeal to physical appearance, to Hurstwood's dress and manner and to the saloon's atmosphere—of which Hurstwood's demeanor is an integral part.

Likewise, Carrie's character is revealed through her attraction to material things. Carrie's trip to a department store both defines and reflects her desire and identity:

> She could not help feeling the claim of each trinket and valuable upon her personally and yet she did not stop. There was nothing there which she could not have used—nothing which she did not long to own. The dainty slippers and stockings, the delicately frilled skirts and petticoats, the laces, ribbons, hair-combs, purses, all touched her with individual desire, and she felt keenly the fact that not any of these things were in the range of her purchase. (22)

Certainly a fascination with the material world motivates Dreiser to amass descriptions of that world; more significantly, however, is the way the material world synecdochically figures his characters, creates their desires, and limits their perceptions. Hurstwood is most in control when he is master of the sumptuous environs of "Hannah and Hogg's Adams Street place." When he has to think beyond the material, to make sense of events or to try to predict the future, he is immediately at sea: "He was merely floating those gossamer threads of thought, which like the spider's, he hoped would lay hold somewhere. He did not know, he could not guess, what the result would be" (106-07).

Frank Algernon Cowperwood is, like Hurstwood, a sensualist and a materialist. His identity is his drive to acquire wealth and art and beautiful women—"I satisfy myself" is his

oft repeated motto. In *The Financier* and *The Titan* Dreiser describes in detail the houses Cowperwood builds, the women he seduces, the gritty machinations of the business deals he directs. In *The Titan*, especially, Dreiser practically lists the series of women Cowperwood goes through as if a list alone will represent Cowperwood's desire for more of everything that is the engine of the first two novels in *The Trilogy of Desire*. But in *The Stoic* Cowperwood seems older, less vital. Pizer attributes this sudden aging—Cowperwood is still energetic at the end of *The Titan*—to Dreiser's own advancing age and waning energies (341). Another explanation is possible, however: Dreiser knew that the third volume would have to contain Cowperwood's death. To prepare the reader for that death, Cowperwood must appear to be winding down. Dreiser, moreover, seems less interested in Cowperwood's drive for mastery. All of the details that previously fascinated Dreiser and allowed him to represent Cowperwood's desire would be clutter in a novel that wishes to make sense of Cowperwood's life.

In *The Financier* and *The Titan*, Cowperwood expends great energy to control events and thereby attempt to transcend them. Jay Clayton provides a concise definition of the transcendent person as someone who "shape[s] the circumstances of life to the pattern of their own desire" (1). Like other Byronic heroes in American literature, Cowperwood seeks to master life's circumstances to express his superiority to those circumstances. Cowperwood, in short, wants to escape the naturalistic law of determinism. Gerber asserts that Dreiser wrote "the *Trilogy* . . . to argue that society need not be succumbed to" (*Theodore Dreiser* 90), and the first two volumes of the trilogy show Cowperwood's indomitable spirit, his refusal to be dictated to by outside forces, be they social or natural. Ultimately, of course, Cowperwood cannot transcend old age and death, yet in *The Stoic* Dreiser wants to find significance in Cowperwood's life. The novel's ending grants transcendence to Berenice, but Cowperwood must remain the novel's tragic figure, the one who succumbs to the material without gaining insight to the spiritual. Dreiser's genius lies in his refusal to take pleasure in the "ironic smashing of Cowperwood's dream" (Gerber, *Theodore Dreiser* 108).

Maintaining his compassion for the human condition, Dreiser refuses to moralize about Cowperwood's materialism—a strong temptation given his 1930s conversion to Communism, a political allegiance that tempered his attraction to the business tycoon as Nietzschean Superman.

The depiction of transcendence in the end of *The Stoic* naturally changes the novel. Clayton writes that transcendence "breaks the line of the story" and alters character, both of which happen in *The Stoic*. "Once the first step is taken, once an author attempts to include a visionary experience in a work of literature," Clayton writes, "all is changed. The grounds of representation suddenly seem unstable" (14). No longer able to rely on physical description to portray Berenice's newly born spiritualism, Dreiser resorts to quotations from the *Bhagavad-Gita* and recounts discussions between Berenice and the guru with whom she studies. All along Dreiser has been relying less on physical description and more on summary and dialogue, however, so it should not be jarring when he practically abandons description in the end. His novel has been building toward a confrontation with issues of transcendence, and to do so he must eschew a realist aesthetic. Once again, Jay Clayton is helpful here: "Since the Absolute can never be rendered in concrete descriptive language, an authentic moment of transcendence can call into question the very premises upon which a realistic novel depends" (2).

The moment of balance between the realistic and romantic, the metonymic and the metaphoric, in *The Stoic* occurs during Cowperwood's funeral. In rendering this scene Dreiser deviates from the reported facts of Yerkes's life. Contemporary newspaper accounts of the funeral focused on Yerkes's career and the status of his will and fortune. Little was written about the death and funeral, except to note that Yerkes had "built a massive tomb in [Brooklyn's] Greenwood Cemetery, which cost $50,000" ("Charles T. Yerkes Dead") and that there had been a brief service at the Yerkes mansion on 5th Avenue and 68th Street ("Said He Was Yerkes' Nephew"). The *Chicago Daily Tribune* insisted flatly, "There was no service at the tomb in Greenwood cemetery" ("Yerkes' Friends"). As part of his research, Dreiser kept newspaper clippings on Yerkes, and he

was aware of accounts of the funeral (Gerber, "Dreiser's Financier"). Aside from the tomb, however, Dreiser invented most of the details for Cowperwood's funeral. Most significantly, he changed the place of the funeral oration from the mansion to the cemetery.

Keeping with Episcopal observance, Dreiser has Reverend Hayward Crenshaw read a scripture lesson from in front of Cowperwood's tomb. Episcopalian practice allows a scripture reading to be formed, at the discretion of the presiding minister, from a number of Biblical passages (Mitchell 221-23). Dreiser may or may not have been working from the Episcopalian Book of Common Prayer, but certainly he would have chosen and arranged the passages for the scripture lesson at Cowperwood's tomb. To reinforce his themes, moreover, in previous descriptions of religious services Dreiser did not hesitate to deviate from established denominational practice. The baptism of Jennie Gerhardt's illegitimate daughter Vesta, for example, takes liberties with Lutheran practice to emphasize certain social rather than religious themes (*Jennie* 422-23; 475 n.115.9).

In his portrayal of Cowperwood's death and its aftermath, Dreiser chose to ignore, as well, the outpouring of moralistic vitriol that accompanied Yerkes's death. Gerber discovers in Dreiser's papers a typed account of a sermon by a Reverend Madison C. Peters deriding Yerkes for "a long life with no generosity while living except to women of doubtful reputation, a life with no love of God, no love to man while living, a life with no goodness" ("Dreiser's Financier" 370). As a one-time friend of H. L. Mencken and as a man with his own talent for satire, Dreiser could have made much of the hypocrisy of the moral condemnation of a man who helped to build what Americans value most: economic prosperity. Instead, the Cowperwood funeral, contained in a relatively short chapter 72, comments movingly on death while subtly rejecting Cowperwood's materialism.

The Cowperwood funeral begins in a "spectacle" as gawkers congregate outside the mansion to see the procession start to the cemetery. Ostentation and display are emphasized in the description of Cowperwood's last destination:

> [T]hey passed through the gates to Greenwood

> Cemetery. The gravel drive gradually mounted a long incline, bordered by heavy trees, behind which ranged stones and monuments of all descriptions. About a quarter of mile in, as the drive continued to rise, a roadway branched off to the right, and a few hundred feet farther on, between great trees, the tomb loomed solemnly high and majestic.
>
> It stood alone, no other monument being within thirty feet of it, a gray, austere, and northern version of a Greek temple. Four graceful columns of modified Ionic design formed the 'porch' and supported a plain triangular pediment, without decoration or religious symbol of any sort. Above the doors of the tomb, in heavy square-cut letters, was his name: FRANK ALGERNON COWPERWOOD. The three graduated platforms of granite were piled high with flowers, and the massive bronze double doors stood wide open, awaiting the arrival of the distinguished occupant. As all must have felt who viewed it for the first time, this was a severely impressive artistic achievement in the matter of design, for its tall and stately serenity seemed to dominate the entire area. (272)

The details here are meant to dazzle, as they fascinate that unnamed "all" who stand witness. Dreiser makes the theme of display explicit when he writes, "And as her carriage came into full view of the tomb, Aileen was again and finally impressed by her husband's power of self-presentation" (272). The funeral so far has been a show, and as the "occupants of the carriages"—Dreiser has yet to call them mourners—settle in "benches and chairs" under "a large marquee tent set up in front of the tomb" (272), one expects something far more theatrical than what follows.

The scripture service, taking little longer than a page (273-74), challenges the material desires of Cowperwood and expresses a spiritual import to human existence without negating Dreiser's view of that existence as determined. In *An American Tragedy* Dreiser uses Biblical passages to demonstrate Clyde Griffiths' narrow religious upbringing (24). Adorning the walls of the Kansas City mission run by Clyde's parents are verses that urge temperance and insist on God's omnipotence and knowledge of personal sin. Although verses

like "For there shall be no reward to the evil man," may seem commonplace, Dreiser employs them as evidence of how Clyde's childhood religion instilled the equation of restrained desire and God's bounty, a lesson Clyde alternately resists in his pursuit of money and sex and tries to follow in his attempts to please his mother. By contrast, in *The Stoic* Dreiser uses the scriptures of Cowperwood's funeral service to comment metaphorically on materialism as a spiritual dead-end.

The service, spoken in "grave and clear" tones, begins with two passages on resurrection. After mention of eternal life in these first two verses, however, Dreiser does not return to that theme, instead focusing on the limits of human life. The folly of possession is underscored in the third verse: "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we carry nothing out." Further challenging Cowperwood's materialism are three of the next verses which assert that "verily every man living is altogether vanity." This vanity is directly connected with pride of possession: "For man walketh in a vain shadow, and disquieteth himself in vain: he heapeth up riches, and cannot tell who shall gather them." More than an ironic foreshadowing of the fate of Cowperwood's fortune and art collection, this verse critiques the limits of the material desire that has driven the characters in Dreiser's trilogy (and, indeed, in so much of his other fiction).

Dreiser nevertheless avoids moralizing. Hochman finds merit in "Dreiser's conviction of the need to refrain from judgment" because it "endow[s] his work with a force and a dimension often lacking in the work of naturalists with whom he is often still associated" (11). Part of Dreiser's artistry is a refusal to lead readers to *his* moral conclusions. Unlike the realists who came before him, Dreiser forces readers to use their own moral categories when interpreting his characters' actions; he does not lead readers to judgments based on authorially established moral positions. For instance, Silas Lapham's "rise" is an evaluative category available in the very title of William Dean Howells's novel. If, in contrast, one wants to brand Carrie a loose woman, Drouet a masher, and Hurstwood a thief, Dreiser will not assist in those judgments. Likewise in *The Stoic*, Cowperwood's funeral is not simply an attempt to label

the character himself. Although the descriptions of the "majestic" tomb function metonymically to suggest Cowperwood's materialism, the scripture reading represents Dreiser's metaphoric use of Cowperwood's death to suggest meanings that encompass all of humanity.

Dreiser is not writing about Cowperwood alone when he includes verses like: "As soon as thou scatterest them they are even as asleep; and fade away suddenly like the grass." And: "In the morning it is green, and groweth up; but in the evening it is cut down, dried up, and withered." Such verses represent the determinism found in the chiasma that structures *Sister Carrie*: Carrie is youth and will grow; Hurstwood is age and will decline. Through recognition of decline and death as facts of human existence, one can come to a greater compassion for other human beings: "The days of our age are three score years and ten; and though men be so strong that they come to four score years; yet is their strength then but labor and sorrow; so soon passeth it away, and we are gone." Here the strength and energy of Cowperwood are forgiven as natural, even as Dreiser uses the verse to remind us of our inevitable end.

"O teach us to number our days: that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom," the scripture reading continues. Limited biologically, we are capable of greater spiritual knowledge. The witnesses to Cowperwood's funeral seem to grasp this message as Dreiser finally describes them as "mourners," mourners perhaps not for Cowperwood but for their own limited existence. The chapter, and Cowperwood's funeral, concludes with less physical description than it opened with. In a passage reminiscent of Hemingway's compressed style, the chapter ends:

> The casket was then lifted by the pallbearers and carried into the tomb and placed in the sarcophagus, while the minister knelt and prayed. Aileen having refused to enter, the other mourners remained with her. And shortly afterward, when the minister came outside, the heavy bronze doors were closed, and the burial services for Frank Algernon Cowperwood were over.
>
> The clergyman went over to Aileen to offer a few words of comfort; the friends and relatives began to leave, and soon the space about the tomb was empty.

> However, Dr. James and Berenice lingered a while in the shadow of a large birch tree, and then walked slowly down the slope along a winding path, as Berenice did not wish to leave with the others. Walking down the path some hundred feet, Berenice looked back to see the last resting place of her beloved, as it stood high and proud in anonymity, the name not being visible from where she stood. High and proud, and yet small, under the protective elms grown tall around it. (274)

From an expression of Cowperwood's vanity the tomb has changed to a symbol of death in life. Both the ambition and insignificance of human life are represented in that last sentence. But the recognition of a common human condition also allows an escape from the self. Though determined by physical realities, we are, it is suggested, not bound in our ability for spiritual connection. John J. Conder, in defending the ending to *The Stoic*, argues that Berenice comes to a deeper spiritual truth by accepting the "triviality" of the self, of egotistic preoccupation (113). Without sacrificing his compassion for Cowperwood and without leading us to moral condemnations of him, Dreiser calls upon the reader to reflect on the implications of Cowperwood's "I satisfy myself."

In *The Stoic* Dreiser searches for a way to dramatize his philosophies. In a review of the novel soon after it was published, Julian T. Sullivan of the *Indianapolis Star* makes a telling point: "It is less encumbered by debate and argumentation than many of his works" (719). A common complaint about Dreiser's novels is that he frequently includes dollops of philosophy. In the Cowperwood funeral scene Dreiser successfully dramatizes his determinism and his desire for spiritual growth. The scripture reading, although consistent with a funeral observance, is placed in the middle of a chapter that turns from Cowperwood's materialism to Berenice's incipient spiritual quest, from the metonymic to the metaphoric; in the process Cowperwood's tomb becomes a metaphor for both the material boundaries and the spiritual possibilities of human existence.

Notes

1. Charles Shapiro awards last place among Dreiser's novels to *The Stoic*: "*The Stoic* is undoubtedly Dreiser's feeblest effort, bad because of unrelieved, laborious descriptions of business dealings, because of hoked up philosophical digressions that would do shame even to a freshman philosophy major, and because of generous quantities of bad writing" (43).

2. Hochman and Pizer nonetheless find in *The Stoic* significant

connections to the rest of Dreiser's art. Hochman locates a typical Dreiser theme in "Berenice's explorations [which] . . . must be seen as part and parcel of Dreiser's life-long interest in all possible modes of seeking and striving—for material goods, spiritual satisfaction, love, money, nirvana" (10). Pizer finds evidence in *The Stoic* of Dreiser's philosophy of the "equation inevitable" in which social and life forces seek balance (157). Philip L. Gerber also connects this Dreiser philosophy with *The Stoic* ("Dreiser's Stoic: A Study in Literary Frustration" 111).

3. More recently, John J. Conder offers an intelligent defense of the ending in *Naturalism in American Fiction: The Classic Phase* (113-17).

4. Contemporary reviewer Lisle Bell harrumphed: "Reading [*The Stoic*] one is confronted with the lumbering, tortured and uninspiring writing which is typically Dreiser, without the vitality and power which were also typically Dreiser" (721).

5. For the debate on Dreiser and Hinduism see R. N. Mookerjee's "Dreiser's Use of Hindu Thought in *The Stoic*" and Miyoko Takeda's "The Theme of Hinduism in *The Stoic*." See Philip L. Gerber's excellent monograph on the composition of *The Stoic* for a summary of the exchange of letters between Dreiser and James T. Farrell in which Dreiser expresses uncertainty about the novel's ending and promises to make changes based on Farrell's suggestions ("Dreiser's Stoic: A Study in Literary Frustration" 138-40).

6. See "Dreiser's Stoic: A Study in Literary Frustration" and "Dreiser's Financier: A Genesis."

7. The point is not that Dreiser was impeccably factual. Malcolm Cowley catches him in a glaring error in a scene in *The Stoic* in which Cowperwood visits "the tomb of Sarah Bernhardt." Cowley, somewhat pettily, charges Dreiser's editors with negligence for not "open[ing] the nearest encyclopedia, where they would have learned that Bernhardt outlived him [the fictional Cowperwood and the real Yerkes] by eighteen years" (723-24). Berenice's quoting (301) of Gandhi in a scene set circa 1905 when Gandhi would have been relatively unknown also defies historical probability. What is significant is that Dreiser chose so often in *The Stoic* to deviate from the quantity of collected facts he had on Yerkes, Emilie Grigsby, and the second Mrs. Yerkes when he stuck more closely to those facts in *The Financier* and *The Titan*.

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Theodore Dreiser and *Martin Dressler*: Tales of American Dreamers

Nancy Warner Barrineau
University of North Carolina at Pembroke

In 1972, Steven Millhauser published the mock-biography *Edwin Mullhouse: The Life and Death of an American Writer, 1943-1954, by Jeffrey Cartwright* to widespread positive reviews. Since then, he has published seven more books of fiction: *Portrait of a Romantic* (1977), *From the Realm of Morpheus* (1985), *In the Penny Arcade* (1986), *The Barnum Museum* (1990), *Little Kingdoms* (1993), *Martin Dressler: The Tale of an American Dreamer* (1996), and *The Knife Thrower and Other Stories* (1998). The book that interests me here is *Martin Dressler*, his latest novel, a finalist for the National Book Award and the winner of a Pulitzer Prize. For a Dreiser scholar, reading this novel produces an eerie sense of *deja vu*—the impression that one has discovered, generations later, a direct literary heir of both *Sister Carrie* and *An American Tragedy*.

Most of the dozen or so reviews and longer articles that treat Millhauser's very literary novel are studies in literary influence and intertextuality. They trace its heritage to antecedents as diverse as Horatio Alger, Henry Adams, Henry James, Wharton, Kafka, Poe, Beckett, Doctorow, Borges, even Dante. But "homage to Dreiser" is oddly missing. I found the link acknowledged in only one sentence in one review: a claim that "Martin's story suggests both the fairy tale optimism of a Horatio Alger rags-to-riches saga and the tragic pessimism of a Dreiserian naturalistic novel: think of Martin as a postmodern Cowperwood" (McLaughlin 185). Dreiser's novels, of course, encompass the same contradiction, and connecting Martin to

Cowperwood is not a long stretch (as R. Z. Sheppard's review of *Martin Dressler* entitled "Trump, The Early Days" would suggest).

When I wrote to Steven Millhauser to inquire about his link to Dreiser, he replied, "about Dreiser: he was one of a number of influences on this book, so your sense of a connection is certainly worth pursuing. But of course the book's profoundest impulse—the push toward the fantastic, the impossible—has nothing to do with Dreiser" (Letter). I would take exception, at least in part, to the second part of Millhauser's comments. Dreiser himself, though of course not a postmodern writer, is not free from the magical, the mystical, himself, as works like "The Lost Phoebe" and *Plays of the Natural and the Supernatural* confirm. "The Magic Crystal," the final coda of *The Financier,* provides evidence that Dreiser was not immune to the impulse toward the "fantastic, the impossible."[1] But Dreiser's sense of realism is also a more "profound impulse" on *Martin Dressler* than Millhauser has himself acknowledged or perhaps even recognized. A Dreiserian realism pervades *Martin Dressler*, providing its structural underpinning.

Millhauser infuses *Martin Dressler*, set in late-nineteenth-century New York City, with realistic details reminiscent of Dreiser's New York. In some sense, Millhauser's novel is a historical novel. As he admitted to a *New York Times* reviewer in 1997,

> "My immediate problem was ignorance. . . . I had chosen to write a period piece. I researched the necessary time and place—what does the front of a cigar store in 1890 look like, for instance? A writer has to steep himself in research. . . . The turn of the century in New York was an era of astonishing physical changes—Manhattan was slowly marching uptown. I read novels of the times, Howells, Wharton." (Smith C18)

He fails to credit another source here, but undoubtedly he read Dreiser as well. In fact, Martin's New York is much closer in spirit and detail to Dreiser's than to either Howells'or Wharton's. Furthermore, Martin is (among other things) a curious pastiche of Carrie Meeber and Clyde Griffiths, even

more than Frank Cowperwood. The novel opens in New York City in 1881, when Martin is nine, so he reaches adulthood about the same time Carrie discovers the same city.[2] Like her, Martin is a restless pacer and watcher of the city that is palpably Carrie's boomtown. He lives in an apartment hotel in the West End and speculates in land, his overwhelming optimism allowing him, despite a treacherous Dreiserian winter, to imagine a future "with trains in the air and trains under the ground, a fierce and magical city of moving iron, while along the trembling avenues there rose, in the clashing air, higher and higher, still buildings" (115). He also shares with Carrie (and with Dreiser himself) a keen eye for clothes and the small details that make them stylish. To name one instance, the narrator shows Martin on one walk "feeling splendid in his new chocolate-brown spring overcoat, look[ing] admiring[ly] at Mrs. Vernon [his future mother-in-law], all decked out in her flower-heaped hat with a green ribbon under the chin, her long green coat with its black cape" (85).

The strangest intertextual link between *Sister Carrie* and *Martin Dressler*, however, is the relationship—or the series of relationships—in which Martin becomes entangled and which eventually lead to a strange union something akin to a marriage among four people. Several years into Martin's business career, while he is working at and living in the Bellingham Hotel, he meets the widowed Mrs. Vernon and her two daughters, the dark, witty, plain Emmeline and the light, languid, beautiful Caroline, in the hotel lobby. They all quickly become friends: they dine, walk around the city, play euchre, and Martin talks (mostly with Emmeline) about his business and the rise of New York, which he dubs the "'tall city'" (66). Finally, Martin marries the quiet and elusive Caroline, after a bizarre and almost accidental proposal relayed to Caroline by Emmeline.

Mary Kinzie has noted Millhauser's fascination with doubling in his earlier works, arguing that the "doubling-of-the-double is one of Millhauser's most pervasive imaginative habits" (119), and the habit is equally prominent in this novel. Most startling is the way in which Caroline (significantly named, I would argue), Emmeline, and Martin are not merely doubles (or triples) for each other but also doubles—or perhaps

fragments—of Dreiser's Carrie. Consider Caroline, a seemingly passive woman who gets what she wants by seeming not to want anything, who endures sex with Martin by pretending to be somewhere else. Their relationship, with its passivity, silence, and apparent lack of sexual passion foregrounds elements of Carrie's relationship with Drouet that Dreiser implies. The only person who arouses Caroline's interest is Claire Moore, a "bored, idle woman who [takes] up Caroline as a hobby" (230). Their relationship, based on dressing with a careful eye toward trendy styles and visiting New York's most fashionable restaurants and theaters, strongly evokes Carrie's friendship with Mrs. Vance. Eventually, Claire tires of Caroline's "crush" with its "fanatical clinging" (228) and drops her. However, in the meantime, Martin has evidenced the same uneasy jealousness that Hurstwood displays toward Mrs. Vance and her social circle. Like Carrie, Caroline is bored with her life, but she doesn't take to the stage or, in fact, manage to do much of anything except play the neurasthenic wife (the exception being an abortive attempt to shoot her sister after Emmeline allows herself to become Martin's substitute wife, at least in the psychological sense).

Emmeline is the other double for Martin and the other piece of Dreiser's Carrie, who despite her passivity displays great ambition and passion in her stage career and, as Dreiser suggests at the end of the novel, beyond the stage as well. After her last encounter with Bob Ames, the narrator reflects on Carrie: "All her nature was stirred to unrest now. She was already the old, mournful Carrie—the desireful Carrie—, unsatisfied. . . . . Carrie! Oh, Carrie! Ever whole in that thou art ever hopeful" (487). This side of Millhauser's Caroline is displaced onto Emmeline, who becomes the striving, restless, desiring half of Caroline and Dreiser's Carrie. Dissatisfied with the stultifying life of an unmarried woman working in a hotel with nothing to do (much like Carrie in the New York flat with Hurstwood except for the lack of a man to care for), Emmeline accepts Martin's offer of a job and thows "herself into [his] business as if into a romance" (132), a phrase that nicely fits Carrie on the stage.

Emmeline and Martin are alike in their restless ambition

and lust for something that doesn't yet seem to exist. As Martin thinks near the end of the novel, "Was there something wrong with him, that he couldn't just rest content? Must he always be dreaming up improvements? And it seemed to Martin that if only he could imagine something else, something great, something greater, something as great as the whole world, then he might rest awhile" (242-43). The quality of this desire as well as the uneasy sense of unnamed dissatisfaction places him directly in the lineage of both Carrie and Clyde. Ultimately, one could say that all these characters fail. But both authors repeatedly celebrate the striving itself. Millhauser's novel illustrates Dreiser's dictum in *Ev'ry Month* in late 1896: "Literature: its greatest records are of lives that were hopeful but came to naught" (170).

Martin's early life evokes not Carrie's but rather Clyde Griffiths'. After a brief start working for his father in the family cigar store, at fourteen he becomes a bellboy in the Vanderlyn Hotel around the corner. His mother resists his desire to drop out of the eighth grade to work full-time, but his father prevails: "Wasn't America the land of opportunity? And wasn't the Vanderlyn Hotel a golden opportunity?" (20) Certainly this position—that business experience, even begun at the bottom as a bell-hop, rather than a traditional education, is what profits one in turn-of-the-century New York—is shared by Dreiser, who dramatizes it in both Carrie and Clyde.

Millhauser infuses his novel with imagery from *The Arabian Nights*, just as Dreiser does *An American Tragedy*. After Martin becomes part of the hotel's world, its "lobby no longer seemed like one of the colored pictures in the Arabian Nights" (10). Nonetheless, the image will continue to haunt him, as it does Clyde. Like Clyde, Martin finds his escape from his family (in his case a lower-middle-class family), from whom he is distanced by his dreams and ambition, in the hotel; and he, too, thrives in the world of errands and tips. In *An American Tragedy*, Dreiser densely and realistically describes the Green-Davidson, the hotel where Clyde works in Kansas City. In this scene he does so through the voice of Oscar Hegglund, another bellboy (from Jersey City) who initiates Clyde into his new job:

> "When de bell rings, if you're at de head of de

> bench, it's your turn, see, an' you jump up and go quick. . . . An' whenever you see anyone come in de door or out of an elevator, de captain rings de bell or calls 'front' or not. . . . Look sharp, cause if you don't get no bags, you don't get no tips, see. Everybody dat has a bag or anyt'ing has to have it carried for 'em, unless dey won't let you have it, see.
>
> "But be sure and wait somewhere near de desk for whoever comes in until dey sign up for a room," he rattled on as they ascended in the elevator. "Most every one takes a room. Den de clerk'll give you de key an' after dat all you gotta do is to carry up de bags to de room. Den all you gotta do is turn on de lights in the batroom and closet, if dere is one, so dey'll know where dey are, see. An' den raise de curtains in de day time or lower 'em at night, and see if dere's towels in de room, so you can tell de maid if dere ain't, and den if dey don't give you no tip, you gotta go, only most times, unless you draw a stiff, all you gotta do is hang back a little—make a stall, see—fumble wit de door-key or try de transom, see. Den, if dey're any good, dey'll hand you a tip. If dey don't, you're out, dat's all, see. . . . Den you come down an' unless dey wants ice-water or somepin, you're troo, see. It's back to de bench, quick. Dere ain't much to it. Only you gotta be quick all de time, see, and not let any one get by you comin' or goin'—dat's de main ting." (38-39)

Millhauser's description of Martin's duties at the Vanderlyn Hotel, with its dense realistic details, might have come from Dreiser, minus the Jersey City dialect: "In his dark green uniform with maroon trim, he sat on a bench near the check-in desk with three other bellboys and watched the main door. When he was at the end of the row it was his turn to spring up whenever the desk clerk rang a bell, unless the buzzer rang and the bellboy captain ordered him up to a room" (20).

Though often in Millhauser's lists, as Arthur M. Salzman notes, "the magical and mundane coalesce" (150), the sights Martin absorbs constitute a veritable Dreiserian catalogue. He is

> astonished by the immense variety of the things people carried: leather Gladstone bags with nickel

> corner protectors, slim leather dress suit cases, soft alligator-skin satchels, pebble-leather club bags, English cabinet bags, canvas telescope bags with leather straps, hatboxes, black umbrellas with hook handles, colored silk umbrellas with pearl handles, white silk parasols with ruffles, packages tied with string; and one morning a woman wearing a hat with fruit on it came in with a brass cage containing a monkey. (21)

He learns the job as Clyde will learn it in the 1920s, down almost to the smallest detail. He is

> not merely to carry the bags, but to lead the way to the elevators—and this meant being careful not to walk too quickly, especially in the case of those who were clearly new to the hotel and seemed a little uncertain, although the opposite error of being overly familiar must also be avoided, while at the same time the bags, however heavy or clumsy, had to be carried without the appearance of struggle. Once in the elevator, it was important to stand in silence beside the bags, to erase oneself behind the dignity of the uniform, while at the same time not seeming cold or indifferent and indeed remaining alert to any sign of helplessness in the traveler. (21)

Once he reaches the room, he proceeds in Clyde's fashion:

> Martin set down the bags, opened the door with the key, and led the way in, setting the bags down wherever he was requested to do so. After that he checked to see that the shades were raised and the curtains open, tested the faucets in the washstand, and made sure the maid had left clean towels. Then he placed the key in the inside keyhole and hesitated ever so slightly as a reminder that he should be tipped. (21-22)

The narrator goes on to list Martin's other duties, nearly identical with Clyde's—fetching pitchers of ice, newspapers, towels, stationary; leaving the hotel to buy cough syrup, shirt collars, and sewing implements, or to finding a shoemaker to do repairs. Like Clyde he is astonished to discover, after a week of work, what he has earned in tips (22). All these shared details

suggest a strong indebtedness to Dreiser's much bigger, even more detailed novel. Millhauser relates this information in flat, realistic prose—what Mary Kinzie (in much the same way some early critics referred to *Sister Carrie)* has condescendingly labeled a "quaintly derivative reportorial style" (136)—that spurns the fantastic.

Martin's quest for sexual experience is also notably like Clyde's. A certain something about him (like Clyde) attracts "the smiles and glances" of female hotel guests of all ages. It is, he decides, not sheer handsomeness, but "some quality of sympathy or curiosity that made him concentrate his deepest attention on them, made him sense their secret moods" (22-23). He is pursued by a woman named Louise Hamilton whose flirtations vaguely arouse him and whose room is reminiscent of the bedrooms in the Green-Davidson that Clyde glimpses fleetingly. Driven by a final encounter with Louise, as well as by the horrifying discovery that he is unwittingly returning the attentions of a ten-year-old girl whose mother regularly abandons her to Martin for free baby sitting in the hotel lobby, he is gripped by the "conviction that something needed to be done about a part of his life he rarely gave much thought to" (51-52).

Thus, like Clyde, Martin begins his quest for sexual experience by visiting a brothel with another hotel employee. Unlike Clyde, he suffers no guilt over these weekly excursions and eventually has sex with all the "girls," though he prefers Gerta the Swede, his first "conquest." At the same time he is becoming drawn compulsively to Maria Haskova, a maid in the hotel. The respective authors' treatments of both Martin's and Clyde's sexual dalliances suggest that sexual desire, as natural as it may be, is in the end a metaphor for something else, an unattainable longing without a name.

In chronicling Martin's business career, Millhauser perhaps makes it even clearer than Dreiser does that desire for money is itself a metaphor, a metonymy for the unnameable thing that is the real object of desire. Martin (like Cowperwood, but not Clyde) rapidly becomes a wealthy financier. He refuses the offer of a job as assistant manager at the Vanderlyn "because his life in the hotel was a dream-life, an interlude, a life from which he

would one day wake to his real life—whatever that might be" (36). He becomes instead a creator of New York as well as its creation. He builds larger, grander, more fabulous lunchrooms and hotels until finally, still driven by a desire he cannot name, he creates the Grand Cosmosarium (nicknamed the Grand Cosmos), "a world within a world, rivaling the world." The narrator intones, "Whoever entered its walls had no further need of that other world" (284). The creation of this world, one that rivals anything Disney could ever produce, allows Millhauser (as well as Martin) his most spectacular indulgence in the fantastic and the magical. Predictably, the Grand Cosmo fails since Martin's vision is shared by neither the masses nor the critics. In the end (like Willy Loman), he realizes that "his only error was to have the wrong dream" (284).

He also suspects that he is being punished for a "desire to create the world," that is, to be like God (284). And that, of course, is what makes this novel metafiction, a novel about creating a novel, for it is clear that Millhauser is writing about himself. Douglas Fowler argues Millhauser "seems to hold that, at the center of things, the imagination cannot be content even with its God-like constructs, and that human beings seem to be, finally and irrevocably, subject to an 'unfulfilled yearning' in our attempt to complete ourselves in a world that can never accommodate us even when that world is self-constructed." It is a world where, as Millhauser has written, "'we do not fit in anywhere'" ("Steven Millhauser" 140). Whether or not Dreiser could have articulated that idea, even by his death in 1945, it is surely one which his own characters intuit.

While beginning with a realism much like Dreiser's, *Martin Dressler* goes far beyond that realism. The novel is in the end a kind of magical realism that, as Steven Millhauser wrote, "push[es] toward the fantastic, the impossible" (Letter) in ways that would not have been entirely possible to Dreiser in his lifetime. Thanks to a brilliant novel that projects our late-twentieth century philosophical preoccupations backwards to the turn of the last century, Martin himself leapfrogs over Dreiser's characters into an anachronistic world that would have been inconceivable to him or to anyone else at the time the novel was set.

But Dreiser's fiction is one of the springboards that make this leap possible. A character in Millhauser's *Portrait of a Romantic* says, "A work of fiction is a radical act of the imagination whose sole purpose is to supplant the world." As a realist, Dreiser would undoubtedly have disagreed. But he goes on to argue that "in order to achieve this purpose, a work of fiction is willing to use all the means at its disposal, including the very world it is plotting to annihilate" (qtd. in Fowler, "Millhauser" 79). *Martin Dressler* is testimony that Dreiser's fiction is alive and well, still capable of exerting its influence, part of the "very world" built upon but not "annihilate[d]" by postmodern fictions like Millhauser's. As Dreiser could not have imagined *Martin Dressler*, without *Sister Carrie* and *An American Tragedy*, Millhauser could not have imagined his own novel exactly as he did.

Notes

1. "The Magic Crystal" reads, in part:

> If you had been a mystic or a soothsayer or a member of that mysterious world which divines by incantations, dreams, the mystic bowl, or the crystal sphere, you might have looked into their mysterious depths at this time and foreseen a world of happenings which concerned these two, who were now apparently so fortunately placed. In the fumes of the witches' pot, or the depths of the radiant crystal, might have been revealed cities, cities, cities; a world of mansions, carriages, jewels, beauty; a vast metropolis outraged by the power of one man; a great state seething with indignation over a force it could not control; vast halls of priceless pictures; a palace unrivaled for its magnificence; a whole world reading with wonder, at times, of a given name.
>
> And sorrow, sorrow, sorrow. . . .
>
> "Hail to you, Frank Cowperwood, master and no master, prince of a world of dreams whose reality was disillusion!" So might the witches have called, the bowl have danced with figures, the fumes with vision, and it would have been true. What wise man might not read from such a beginning, such an end? (448)

2. There are some intriguing similarities that may or may not be

coincidental. For instance, Martin, born in August 1872, is in fact almost exactly a year younger than both Carrie Meeber and Dreiser, whose brother Paul, of course, Americanized his name to Dresser. The strange similarity between these names has led at least one bookstore in my area to shelve *Martin Dressler* next to Dreiser's novels.

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Reviews

***Twelve Men*, ed. Robert Coltrane. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998. 441 pp. Cloth $45.**

***Dawn*, ed. T. D. Nostwich. Santa Rosa, California: Black Sparrow Press, 1998. 616 pp. Deluxe $35, Cloth $30, Paper $17.50.**

The University of Pennsylvania Dreiser Edition under the general editorship of Thomas P. Riggio takes another giant step towards realizing (albeit posthumously) Theodore Dreiser's life-long desire for a collected edition of his works. When *Twelve Men*—now edited by Robert Coltrane with textual editors James L. W. West III and Lee Ann Draud—was first in press in the winter of 1919, Dreiser thought of the manuscript as hauling away "a lot of material which would annoy me because I could not take the time to novelize it all." Yet he thought the book one of his best works thus far, and this judgment was borne out when Richard D. Lehan chose *Twelve Men* as one of three texts to represent the Dreiser canon in the prestigious Library of America series. In his review of the original *Twelve Men*, H. L. Mencken pronounced it pure, vintage Dreiser—"a deliberate return to his first manner . . . of pure representation, of searching, understanding, of unfailing gusto and contagious wonderment."

As Dreiser scholars know, most of the sketches in *Twelve Men* are "vintage Dreiser" because they were drafted during the first decade of the twentieth century—a period in which Dreiser experienced literary disappointment, a nervous breakdown, and finally an almost phoenix-like rise as first magazine editor and then recovered novelist. For the biographer, the book is one of

the most indispensable primary sources, with sketches of Dreiser's father-law; his family doctor; the wrestler who ran the sanitarium to which Paul sent his brother in 1903; big brother Paul himself (which reads like a love letter); Mike Burke, the masonry foreman on the New York Central Railroad for whom Dreiser worked in the fall of 1903; Peter McCord, who along with Arthur Henry became Dreiser's most influential contemporary in the making of *Sister Carrie*; and William Louis Sonntag, the gifted magazine illustrator who served indirectly as the model for Eugene Witla in *The "Genius"*. There are other representations in the book, of course, but they one and all seem to mirror their creator's dreamy sense of the world. The one difference between the people these sketches project and the real thing, of course, was genius—with no need for the apologetic quotation marks

The sketches are fiction but fiction based loosely on fact. Archibald White, Jug's father, would have liked his profile because it overlooks the negative aspects of his patriarchal personality. Yet William Muldoon as well as his friends was offended by "Culhane, The Solid Man." What these sketches show overall, however, is Dreiser's intense interest in human behavior in the face of the cosmic contradiction that painted life as both tragic and beautiful. He remembers—or misremembers—everything in Balzacian detail. Often like Balzac there is some overkill (the reviewer of *Twelve Men* for the *New York Times*, for example, wrote of being "profoundly bored"), but at his best, which Dreiser certainly approached in *Twelve Men* as he slowly moved towards the original spark of his literary genius in *An American Tragedy*, he buffets the reader with the jolts and joys of his protagonists.

Dawn is fiction, too, but also indispensable to the facts of Dreiser's life. For this reason, it is fortunate to have T. D. Nostwich's annotated edition of the first volume of Dreiser's planned four-volume autobiography. Aside from the annotations and an index, however, it is not a scholarly edition with textual emendations; that book, which will have somehow to reflect the various stages of the text in its existing holograph and typescript, will have to wait its turn in the University of Pennsylvania Press

edition of the complete works. In the meantime, Professor Nostwich, a veteran Dreiser scholar who has edited both the University of Pennsylvania editions of the *Journalism* and *Newspaper Days* (the second volume of Dreiser's projected autobiography), has brought back into print the 1931 edition of *Dawn*. Even the dust jacket of the Black Sparrow Press edition simulates the original dust jacket, which presents a rising sun. To my knowledge, it is the first reprinting of the 1931 autobiography since its paperback appearance as a Fawcett Premier Book in 1965, now long out of print.

Dreiser began writing what ultimately became the two volumes of his autobiography in 1912 or 1913, stimulated to do so no doubt after having written his autobiographical novel, *The "Genius"*. Once he had signed up with Liveright's publishing firm in 1920, he went back to finish what became volume two—to which he added for its beginning the final ten chapters of the unpublished text of *Dawn*. He published this as *A Book About Myself* (Liveright's suggestion, which Dreiser later changed to *Newspaper Days*) in 1922. Subsequently, Dreiser anguished over the decision to publish *Dawn* because of its intimate family details. Perhaps to follow up on the fame of *An American Tragedy*, he released *Dawn* in 1931, but only after having it "censured" by Louise Campbell, his Philadelphia lover and typist. Nostwich notes in his introduction that the final text was also altered to reflect such recent events as the Russian Revolution and the coming of Prohibition.

Thus with these two editions we add "fiction" and "fact" to the modern Dreiser canon. One wonders whether Dreiser ever knew the difference—or cared. His was a world of fascination in which his almost obsessive dependence upon massive detail added up to more than its sum. As Mencken put it in *A Book of Prefaces* (1917), Dreiser's "aim is not merely to tell a tale; his aim is to show the vast ebb and flow of forces which sway and condition human destiny." We find some of the best of this in *Twelve Men* and *Dawn.*

—Jerome Loving, Texas A&M University

Marguerite Tjader. *Love That Will Not Let Me Go: My Time with Theodore Dreiser*. Ed. Lawrence E. Hussman. Modern American Literature: New Approaches. New York: Peter Lang, 1998. vii + 131 pp. Paper $19.95.

Late in this account of her relationship with Theodore Dreiser, Marguerite Tjader tells of an experience that occurred shortly after Dreiser's death:

> I had said goodbye to the silent figure, and the next morning, I was on my little patio where we had sat so many times; everything was lovely as usual, the flowers, the view of the distant hills, the sunlight, having in it the gift of life. I sat there in a daze, half-seeing, half-remembering. . . . Suddenly, I felt that Dreiser was there beside me. I can't explain how. Just the fullness of his presence, completely real. I did not want to move, flooded with an inner gladness. Time seemed suspended. But then I realized it was getting late.
>
> "Come, Teddy, we have to go to the funeral," I said, out loud, and he got up with me. Then he was gone. . . . (71)

In this brief scene are encompassed many of the features that distinguish this memoir from Tjader's earlier, more formal, and more comprehensive *Theodore Dreiser: A New Dimension* (1965): the serene acceptance of what Tjader saw as a mystical, almost supernatural connection between herself and Dreiser; the equally serene omission of details about the conflict between Tjader and Helen Dreiser at the time of Dreiser's death; the placing of Dreiser, urbanite and world traveler, in a series of ordered, peaceful natural settings; and above all the strong sense of Dreiser's powerful spirit pervading her world without dominating it. As she tells the reader early in her narrative, "I wish to summon up his presence," and, more clearly than in her earlier book, her portrait of Dreiser is equally a portrait of Marguerite Tjader as "a personality, a writer, and a connoisseur of life" (4).

As readers of Richard Lingeman's *Theodore Dreiser: An American Journey*, *1908-1945* (1990) and other works are

aware, Marguerite Tjader first met Dreiser in 1928 when she was twenty-seven years old. Their professional and personal relationship lasted with intermittent absences throughout the late thirties until Dreiser's death in 1945, although the period of greatest collaboration occurred during the long-delayed completion of *The Bulwark* (1946) in the mid-1940s, a process detailed in *Theodore Dreiser: A New Dimension*. A novelist in her own right (*Borealis*, 1931) and the founder, in 1937, of *Direction* magazine (Dreiser's contributions to which are reprinted in this volume), Tjader was an independent woman who thought that Dreiser "would have preferred to have me a little more dependent on him" (12). It is this independence that she stresses in revealing that what Lingeman and others had necessarily called a "literary friendship" was in fact the love affair that, according to Lawrence Hussman's introduction, scholars had long suspected. Drawn to Dreiser by what she repeatedly images as the magnetic, almost hypnotic force of his gaze and his sympathetic listening, Tjader describes what he termed his "varietism" not as selfishness but as generosity, the expression of what she somewhat hazily terms a "love magnetism" that "must be ever renewed, refreshed, so that it did not fade out or become blocked by static emotions" (39). For Tjader, Dreiser's love of women and sexual energy was simply another channel through which flowed the life force that drove his passionate concern for others and his almost monastic devotion to his work. Indeed, "nature" and "natural" emerge as significant ideas in the work: for example, Tjader's brief but spirited defense of Dreiser's style suggests that he wished to "express the thought in him in its most exact and natural way" (59), and her most descriptive scenes depict a Dreiser working and relaxing in natural settings—Dreiser's Iroki; Tjader's seaside house, "The Shack"; and the nasturtium-covered patio of Tjader's rented house in the California hills.

What emerges clearly in this account is a kind of bravery on Tjader's part—when, for example, she refuses to place Dreiser's demands above family commitments to her son and mother despite considerable pressure, or declines to take him for drives because to do so would intrude on Dreiser's evening drives with Helen, who enjoyed this time with him. In a recent

article for *Dreiser Studies* on the extensive editing of this book and his personal recollections of Marguerite Tjader, Lawrence Hussman described what he termed Tjader's "magnanimity of spirit," an attitude that, to judge from the evidence in the memoir, derives from a strongly-held and strongly-willed idealism that refused to admit some of the lesser emotions. His excellent notes and introduction meticulously detail the biographical framework and significance of Tjader's work, yet Hussman poses one question for which there seems no good answer: "How could this woman, who displayed such independence of thought and action in other precincts of her life, virtually genuflect in memory of such a man?" (xiii). Perhaps Tjader herself supplies a partial response. In describing the almost slavish devotion to Dreiser shown by his second wife, Helen, Tjader draws an implicit comparison to her own situation: "But the love directed and shared with a third love, love for children, for common work, or for a shared ideal, has another dimension. Helen saw this, realized it, finally, but she could not entirely live by it, and so escape the storms and torments of her own emotions" (68). Clearly Tjader believes that her own mastery of the concept of the "third love"—in this case, both the shared ideal of *Direction* magazine and her obvious love for her son—preserves a necessary balance and protects her from Helen's fate.

Readers hoping for further revelations about Tjader's influence over Dreiser during the writing of *The Bulwark*, or for a long-delayed admission that her spiritual vision and not Dreiser's own is represented there, will not find this information here, for Tjader resolutely insists on Dreiser's belief in a God compatible with contemporary science. Yet her determined efforts to demonstrate that his philosophy of love and life has both consistency and integrity make the Dreiser of this book a much more generous and appealing figure than the one drawn in earlier biographies. If *Love That Will Not Let Me Go* does not, as the book jacket optimistically puts it, "establish once and for all that Dreiser was not the womanizer of myth," it does present the remarkable relationship between two "apostles of nature," to use Robert Elias's term, who, in Tjader's account, called forth the best from each other.

—Donna Campbell, Gonzaga University

***Dreiser and Veblen, Saboteurs of the Status Quo*, by Clare Virginia Eby. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998. 228 pp. Cloth $34.95.**

The goals of this interdisciplinary study are threefold: reading Dreiser through Veblen and Veblen through Dreiser, and, as Professor Eby notes in her introduction, to use both as extended examples of how "literature and social science can come together on the ground of cultural criticism." While an ambitious undertaking, this study succeeds well in three such linked endeavors. Carla Cappetti's work in *Writing Chicago: Modernism, Ethnography and the Novel* (1993), on which the Eby book partly builds, constructed essential scholarly bridges between the Chicago School of Sociology and the post-Dreiserian Chicago naturalists, James T. Farrell, Richard Wright, and Nelson Algren. Cappetti's argument that there are "exchanges" of narrative form, metaphorical pattern, and crucial themes between sociology and literature is given further clarity in the Eby scrutiny. Furthermore, as a highly thoughtful analyst of key texts by Dreiser and the noted early-twentieth-century economist/sociologist Thorsten Veblen, Professor Eby positions the two in the oppositional tradition of the public intellectual.

With care and precision, the book places some of Veblen's central social scientific concepts "into dialogue" with such Dreiser gems as *Sister Carrie*, *Jennie Gerhardt*, and *An American Tragedy* as well as with his autobiographical narratives such as *Dawn*. One topos the two men share is the force of class structure on the lives of desiring urban characters unable to analyze, much less curb, what Veblen in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) famously called "conspicuous consumption." Professor Eby uses the important approach, however, of extending her study beyond that work to others such as *The Theory of Business Enterprise* (1904), in which Veblen delineates further theories about how class position structures the modern capitalist personality.

She is similarly persuasive in tying Veblen's theories to Dreiser's analogous fictional pursuers of social mobility. In a

mid-book chapter on *Sister Carrie* and *An American Tragedy*, for example, Professor Eby notes astutely: "For Dreiser as for Veblen, the watching, comparing, emulating self-in-construction replaces the self-contained globule of desire."

In addition to its probing comparisons of everything from the two men's life stories to their wide-ranging cultural critiques, another aspect of the book's appeal is a more "literary" reading of Veblen, an excellent stylist, than he customarily receives. But perhaps the most telling contribution of this useful new study is to contend that Dreiser, like Veblen, by seizing radical authority and projecting a persona of the "lonely truth teller," attacked "privileged sources of authority." This line of thinking is a salutary corrective to or at least qualification of recent arguments about Dreiser's capitalist complicity.

—Laura Hapke, Pace University

News & Notes

In Memoriam

Dr. Neda M. Westlake, for thirty-five years a librarian in the University of Pennsylvania Van Pelt Library's Rare Book Division and Department of Special Collections (as the Annenberg Rare Book and Manuscript Library was then variously called), died on Wednesday morning, April 7th. Her wish was to be cremated, and her remains will be placed in her family plot in Colorado. There was a memorial service in June, at Normandy Farms Estates, Blue Bell, PA, the community where she had lived in retirement.

Dr. Westlake earned her Ph.D. at Penn for her edition of Richard Penn Smith's *Caius Marius: A Tragedy*, published by the University of Pennsylvania Press in 1968. She prepared a facsimile edition of the 1749-68 Trustees' minutes (1974), an important contribution to the history of Penn; collaborated with Professor Otto E. Albrecht on a catalog of the Marian Anderson Collection at Penn (1981); and wrote numerous articles and exhibition catalogs.

Her most important scholarly work, she might have thought, concerned Theodore Dreiser, and its summit was the work she contributed to editing Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* from manuscript and typescript remains of the novel. This 1981 edition "restored" some 40,000 words to the book.

Even *People* ran an article about it, with a headline Neda loved: "Librarian Neda Westlake Exhumes a Sexier 'Sister Carrie' from Dreiser's Uncensored Papers" (July 6, 1981, p. 53). "I think I would have liked Dreiser because he had a general appeal to women," the article quotes her as saying. "He was more interested in women—their lives and reactions—than in men."

So widely recognized was the significance of this work that its success initiated a project intended to re-edit more of Dreiser's works than *Sister Carrie* alone. New editions of his works, based on close examination of the extensive manuscript and other archival materials preserved primarily at Penn as one of its most distinguished collections, would focus new attention on Dreiser. They would also permit a far more faithful representation of what could be ascertained of the authorial intentions of this major figure in American twentieth-century literature than any of his books, extensively cut and altered prior to their original publication, currently permitted.

The University of Pennsylvania Press Edition of the Works of Theodore Dreiser, under the general editorship of University of Connecticut Professor of English Thomas P. Riggio, remains an ongoing project at the Press and the Library. Dr. Westlake continued as an active member of the editorial board well into retirement.

Neda McFadden Westlake was born at Steamboat Springs, Colorado, on September 2, 1914. She married Thayer Westlake in 1936, after their freshman year at Wheaton College where she majored in English and he in theology. After she graduated in 1939, she settled in Philadelphia, where Thayer became a minister and Neda got a doctorate in American civilization from Penn.

Beginning in October of 1949 as an Assistant to the Curator of Rare Books, she became Assistant Curator in 1955 and Curator in 1960. In 1962, Neda Westlake became Librarian of the Rare Book Division. She lived in Chestnut Hill with the miniature schnauzers she adored. Long widowed, she retired on October 1, 1984, after thirty-five years of service, and moved to Normandy Farms. Although her sight and health began to fail her a few years ago, it was not until she gave up keeping dogs even in retirement that her friends realized how ill she had really become. She leaves no immediate survivors.

Call for Papers

Dreiser Studies is planning a special issued dedicated to the memory of Neda Westlake. Scholars who knew Neda and benefited from her stewardship of the Dreiser Collection are invited to submit tributes and reminiscences with a suggested length of from 1,000 to 2,000 words. Also invited are original essays on Dreiser that make substantial use of previously unpublished materials in the collection. Please send submissions to:

Stephen Brennan
Dreiser Studies
Department of English
Louisiana State University in Shreveport
Shreveport, LA 71115
email: iroki2@aol.com

A *Sister Carrie* Centenary

Theodore Dreiser's great novel *Sister Carrie* will mark the 100th anniversary of its first publication on 8 November 2000. In celebration of the event, the International Dreiser Society, together with the University of Pennsylvania Libraries, will host "A Sister Carrie Centenary" in Philadelphia, on the Penn campus, 9-11 November 2000.

The Centenary, sponsored also by the University of Pennsylvania Press and by Kelly Writers House at Penn, will involve Dreiser scholars and critics, Penn faculty and students, alumni of the university, and Dreiser readers from the Philadelphia area and elsewhere.

The Centenary celebration will open on the 9th of November with a public lecture by the essayist and critic Joseph Epstein, recently retired as editor of the *American Scholar* and a longtime Dreiser admirer and advocate. The lecture will coincide with the opening of a major exhibit at the Van Pelt Library of Sister Carrie materials from Dreiser's papers at Penn and from other libraries and collections.

Also planned are a production of *Under the Gaslight*, the Augustin Daly melodrama in which Carrie makes her theatrical debut in Chicago, and a performance of the songs of Paul Dresser, Dreiser's brother, by Tedi Dreiser Godard, the author's grandniece.

The Centenary will include a Dreiser film festival, with showings of *Sister Carrie*, *A Place in the Sun*, and *My Gal Sal*; a panel session with three Dreiser biographers; a scholarly session on the texts of *Sister Carrie*; and a session on women in Dreiser's fiction.

Also planned are alumni book talks led by Dreiser scholars and Penn faculty members; an online alumni book club, and an event website.

To receive information about the conference, including plans for the scholarly sessions, send your name, address, and e-mail address to :

Barbara B. Hoyer
Special Events Manager
Van Pelt Library
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia PA 19104-6206
hoyer@ben.dev.upenn.edu

Inquiries to:

James L. W. West III
International Dreiser Society
302 Ihlseng Cottage
Pennsylvania State University
University Park PA 16802
jlw14@psu.edu

With this issue, Clare Eby retires as editor of *Dreiser Studies*; with this issue, too, Nancy Warner Barrineau leaves as book review editor. Keith Newlin and Stephen Brennan will become co-editors, and Miriam Gogol will become book review editor. Submissions may be sent to either editor; books for review should be sent to Miriam Gogol, Department of English, SUNY/ Fashion Institute of Technology, New York, NY 10001; *email*: gogolmir@fitsuny.edu. All other correspondence concerning subscriptions and back issues should continue to be sent to Keith Newlin.